

Floating Down the Yangtze River

Bryce sighed heavily. “I was thinking we could just hop on a boat here in Shanghai. I didn’t realize we had to fly to another city in order to float down the Yangtze River (pronounced *YAHNG-dzuh*),” he muttered.

“Oh, one more flight isn’t a big deal,” Avaron replied. “Besides, it’s bound to be a lot easier to flow downriver than to try to cruise up it. After all, the Yangtze *ends* at Shanghai; that’s where it meets the sea.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m just tired and ready to relax on a boat for a while. Are you ready? Our taxi is here to take us to the airport.”

Bryce and Avaron loaded their bags in the trunk of the car and climbed into the backseat. The taxi moved slowly through the dense traffic, finally arriving at the airport. Their flight took them to Chongqing (pronounced *chuhng-chihng*), the leading river port and industrial center of southwestern China.

As they left the airport, Avaron said, “I see how this place got the nickname ‘Fog City.’ Good thing our plane was able to land—the fog is getting thicker.”

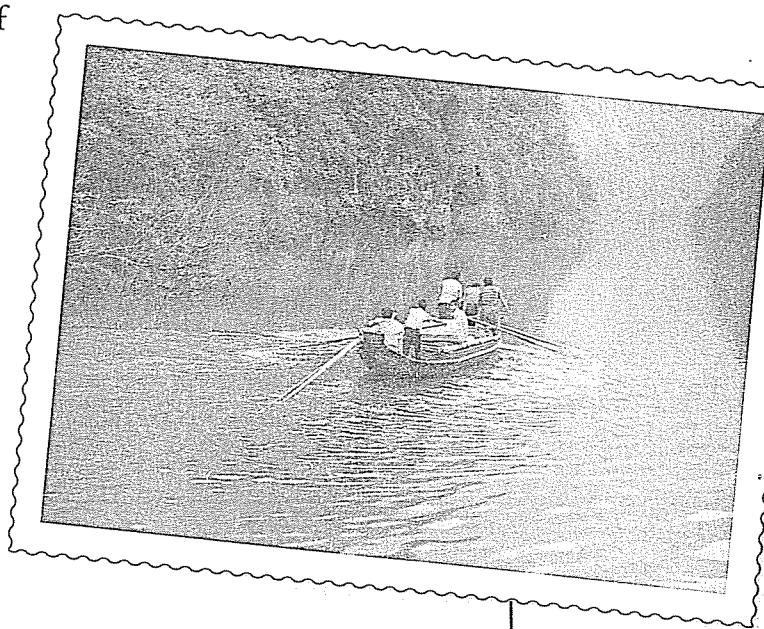
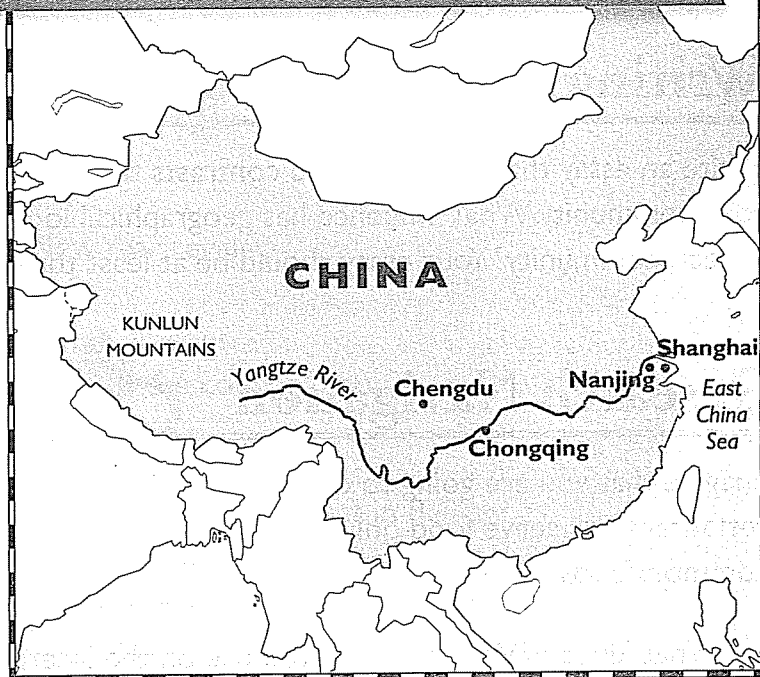
Bryce responded, “What did the travel guidebook say? I think Chongqing is socked in with a thick layer of fog 68 days a year.”

“It certainly gives the city’s hills an air of mystery,” Avaron said. “It reminds me of San Francisco, another hilly, foggy city.”

The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia, and one of the longest rivers in the world. It begins in the Kunlun Mountains of Tibet and continues to the East China Sea near Shanghai. The river is 3,900 miles long.

“The Yangtze is one of the busiest rivers in the world,” Avaron noted.

“I guess you just can’t escape crowds and activity in China,” Bryce mused.



The Yangtze River is one of the longest rivers in the world.

"The water is so deep that large ships can travel 700 miles inland from the coast," said Avaron.

Besides Shanghai, other large cities served by the river include Nanjing, Chongqing, and Chengdu. All of these cities have a strong industrial focus. Chongqing is home to three major industries: automobile manufacturing, natural gas, and steel and aluminum. It also has a rapidly developing tourism industry.

Bryce and Avaron walked down the street looking for the tour office to book their boat trip. Suddenly, they heard a strange, vibrating note. Then they heard what sounded like pained cries and an abrupt barking noise. They looked at one another, and then they silently walked toward the sounds.

They came to a shop with its door open. A man was seated inside, holding an instrument upright on his thigh. This was the source of the noise.

"What is that?" asked Bryce and Avaron in unison. The man looked up and smiled. "This is the erhu (pronounced *are-who*), a Chinese fiddle," he explained.

"I'm glad you speak English," said Avaron. "We don't speak Mandarin, but I sure would like to learn more about the erhu."

"It sounds like a bumblebee from Mars," said Bryce. Avaron poked him in the side, but the shopkeeper just laughed.

"It's different to the western ear, I know," he said. "But listen to this." He used a bow to play the two-stringed instrument, producing a haunting melody.

"Oh, that's beautiful," said Avaron when he finished playing. He handed her the instrument so she could look at it more closely. The two steel strings ran along a long, narrow neck to a drum-like sound box covered with snakeskin.

Bryce wandered around the store looking at the other instruments. The shopkeeper asked where they were going, and Bryce glanced at his watch.

"Uh-oh, we're supposed to find the booking office for the Yangtze River boat cruise before it closes. Can you tell us where it is?" he asked.

The shopkeeper volunteered to walk them to the office, which was close by. As they entered, they saw crowds of people huddled around the ticket windows.

"Whoa, what's going on here? Where's the line?" Bryce asked.

The shopkeeper laughed again. "Chinese people don't stand in a line. We just push our way to the window," he explained. "Come on, I'll help you."

The shopkeeper helped the kids purchase their tickets. They thanked him, and everyone said *bai bai* (Mandarin for *good-bye*). The kids were set to leave on their river cruise early the next morning.

"I was reading in our guidebook about the most famous food in town. I think we should try it for dinner," said Bryce.

Avaron looked at him suspiciously. "I do not want snakes or fried caterpillars."



A bow is used to play the erhu, a Chinese fiddle.

"Fried caterpillars are actually quite good," said Bryce. He continued, "Come on, trust me. It's called a hot pot. The pot is filled with a soup base. We get to choose how spicy we want it to be. Then we put in whatever meat and vegetables we want, let them cook, pull them out, and dip them in the sauce that is served as part of the dish."

Avaron agreed, and the kids went into the restaurant Bryce had read about. They ordered a hot pot and asked that the soup base be only mildly spicy. Avaron knew that Sichuan food was often spicy hot, so she figured ordering an extra spicy dish would just be asking for trouble.

By the time they finished eating, they were both feeling sleepy.

The next day, Bryce and Avaron boarded the boat for a three-day cruise. The first stop was in the ancient town of Fuling. Bryce and Avaron and other tourists from the boat went to White Crane Ridge. This large rock by the river contains thousands of engravings. It was used for centuries to mark low-water levels. Travelers from long ago also carved poems and information about their journeys on the rock. Most of the inscriptions are from the Song Dynasty (960–1280 A.D.).

On their way back to the boat through town, Bryce and Avaron looked out at the lush farmland. The river valley was covered with rice paddies and fields of corn.

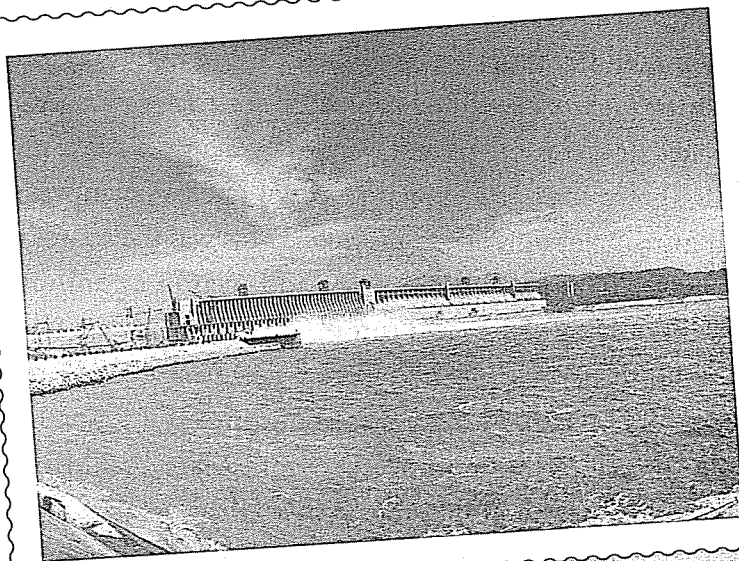
"The most fertile land in China is found along this river," Bryce commented.

"And soon much of it will be flooded, after the completion of the Three Gorges Dam," Avaron noted.

"Yeah, the dam is a controversial project," Bryce said. "On the bright side, it will help to control the massive flooding of the Yangtze. One of the worst floods here was in 1931 when 140,000 people died. And the dam, which will be the largest in the world, will provide electrical power to China's growing cities. But it will also create a huge lake that will flood farmland, towns, and ancient sites."

"I read that somewhere between 1.3 and 1.9 million people will have to relocate," said Avaron. "China's economy is changing from one based on rural farming to one based on urban industry. The building of the dam is a reflection of the changes going on in China today."

Bryce and Avaron stood on the ship's deck and enjoyed the fragrant orchards of orange and tangerine trees they sailed past. The next stop was in Fengdu. This



The Three Gorges Dam will be the largest in the world.

town is said to be the home of ghosts and devils. Bryce and Avaron wandered through many temples that honored the gods of the underworld.

As the boat drifted farther downstream, Bryce pointed to a 12-story wooden pagoda on a cliff. "That's called the Stone Precious Stockade. When the dam is finished, the water will come up to its base. However, the town that lies below it will be completely submerged."

The next day, the boat stopped in Wanxian, the trip's halfway point. "This city will have the largest number of people affected by the dam," said Avaron. "By the time the dam is completed, 800,000 people will be forced to move away."

At last, the boat approached the Three Great Gorges. Over thousands of years, the Yangtze River cut through rock, forming deep narrow valleys with very steep sides. Wind Box Gorge is only 500 feet wide at its widest point. Moss-covered limestone peaks soar 4,000 feet above the river. After passing through this first dramatic gorge, the boat stopped in Wushan for excursions to the Three Little Gorges. People boarded smaller boats called sampans to go up the Danning River.

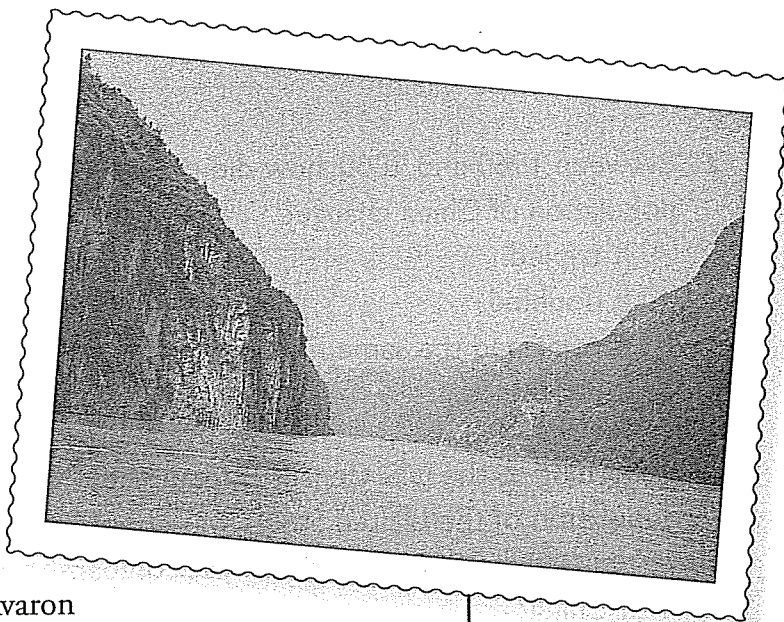
The Little Gorges are much narrower than the Great Gorges. At one point, the river is only a few yards wide. Here, men waded in the water and pulled the sampan along with ropes. Passing by terraced hillsides, Bryce and Avaron watched other sampans float past. These wooden boats are about 15 feet long. Some have small shelters on them in which people live.

The Little Gorges are surrounded by rows of strange peaks, many rising high into the clouds. One is called Shennu Feng, or Goddess Peak. It is topped by a rock that looks like a girl watching the boats passing by.

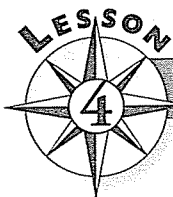
Avaron explained, "It is said the rock is Yao Ji, the youngest daughter of the Heavenly Mother. She guides boats through the gorge. Legend says that she built a palace here and shared it with 11 fairy handmaidens. These 12 maidens became the peaks at Wu Gorge."

As they returned to the Yangtze, Bryce said, "The dam will create a tremendous reservoir. This body of stored water will allow huge ships to travel much farther up the river than they can now. I guess it's a trade-off—the reservoir will cover a lot of rich farmland, but it will control the dangerous flooding of the Yangtze and allow for more industrial development and trade."

"Still, it's sad to think of all that will be lost when the waters rise," Avaron commented, as Bryce nodded in agreement.



The Three Great Gorges on the Yangtze River



Name _____

Date _____

Chart the Course



Use the graph to answer each question.

1. How much did the population in China grow from 1960 to 2000?

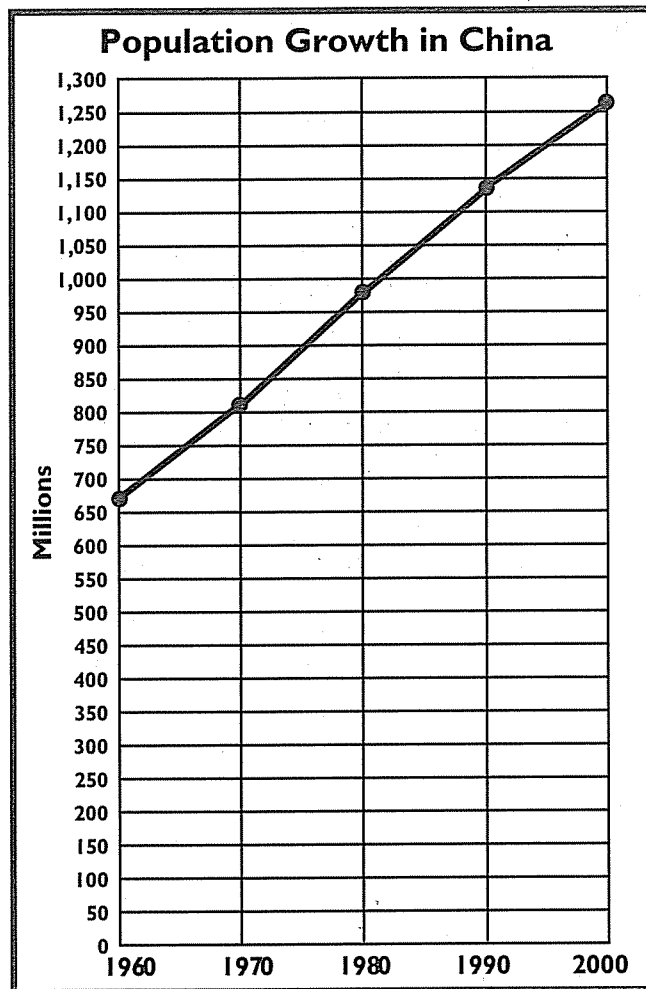
(A) 6 million
(B) About 60 million
(C) 6 billion
(D) Almost 600 million

2. Between 1960 and 2000, how did the population of China change?

(A) It tripled.
(B) It doubled.
(C) It remained the same.
(D) It decreased.

3. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of the United States was about 280 million in 2000. How does that compare with China?

(A) China has about four times as many people.
(B) China has double the number of people.
(C) The United States has half as many people.
(D) The United States has about four times as many people.



4. Use the graph to predict how you think the population will change in the next ten years.

5. In 1979, the Chinese government established a "one-child rule." Each family in China could have only one child. What effect do you think this law might have on the population of China?



Name _____

Date _____

Vocabulary Voyage



Write the word from the box that completes each word group.

controversy
reservoir

engraving
rural

gorge
urban

industrial

1. storage, lake, _____
2. city, town, _____
3. dispute, argument, _____
4. carving, print, _____
5. farmland, country, _____
6. business, production, _____
7. valley, canyon, _____

Use each word in the box to write complete sentences.



Comprehension Expedition



Darken the circle for the best answer.

1. Why do you think ancient people marked water levels on the rock at White Crane Ridge?
 - (A) To prepare for flooding from the Yangtze River
 - (B) To know where to build a new dam
 - (C) To act as a road sign to travelers
 - (D) To leave historical information

2. Which of the following is not true about the Three Gorges Dam project?
 - (A) The lake formed by the dam will cover important sites.
 - (B) The dam will provide electrical power for many cities.
 - (C) The reservoir will form more rich farmland.
 - (D) The dam will be the largest in the world.

3. Avaron said, "The building of the dam is a reflection of the changes going on in China today." What change in China does the dam address?
 - (A) Many people like to take river cruises. The dam addresses the growing need for recreation in China.
 - (B) China needs more farmland to produce food for the growing population. The dam will provide needed water for crops.
 - (C) More jobs are needed for the large population in China. Many jobs have been created by the building of the dam.
 - (D) More and more people live in urban areas in China. The dam addresses the growing need for electricity in the large cities.

Use complete sentences to answer the question.

4. What evidence in the passage supports the statement "China is dependent on water for transportation of goods"?
